



United States Mission to the OSCE

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First of all, I want to thank your Rector, Rector Rusnac, for inviting me to your University and Ambassador Hodges for inviting me to your country, because we have a rule in the U.S. Department of State that is you cannot go into a country where we have an ambassador – which is practically every country in the world – unless you have their permission. And if she said no, she didn't want me here in Moldova, then even President Bush couldn't have helped me get in.

Coming here has been exciting for a number of reasons. First, I care very deeply for the people of Moldova and want to see them enjoy the fruits of democracy. Second, flying here brought back memories of a time, not so long ago, when it would have been almost impossible to make this journey from Washington directly to Chisinau. Yet, just about twenty-four hours ago, I was in Washington, D.C. and then I flew to Vienna, where I work as the U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE. Then, I had about a three-hour layover to change my suitcase and say hello to my wife and then I got onto an airplane to fly here to Chisinau. It's quite a miracle, isn't it? Now. Let us work towards a day when we can travel that freely anywhere in the world!

I want to thank you for being here this afternoon and tell you how honored I am to see so many faces out here, and I assume you came not because your Rector made you come, but because you are interested in the things that I will say.

Third, I was very excited about coming here because you are coming upon a very important date in the history of your country. And that date is March 6, the date of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

When we think of voting and you begin to focus on it, you see that it is an extraordinarily dramatic act in the evolution of man and how relatively recently in the history of mankind the privilege of voting is, the privilege of having the people – not a king, not a dictatorship, not a leadership of force, but a leadership of the people – decide who shall govern them and how they shall be governed. Before President Bush nominated me for this ambassadorship, I was a lawyer in New York and Washington and my practice was to fight the United States Government. I was hired by companies who had problems with the United States Government – who didn't like what the government was doing to them. And I loved fighting the government. And now I'm one of them.

One of the things I enjoyed the most in the U.S., was when we had election day. Because when I didn't like the senior people in the U.S. Government, who were giving my clients problems, I would, by just pulling a voting lever, get rid of them all on election day. And just

think, when you look at history – you all study history – the history of humankind, what it took in the past to get rid of governments. It took fighting, it took guns, it took death, it took blood, tears and turmoil. And yet, under democracy, by going to the polls, by taking advantage of that extraordinary privilege to vote, you can change the entire government. And that's why March 6th is so important to you and that's why November 2, 2004, when we had our elections in the United States, was so very important to me. Even though I'm not a young man anymore, November 2, 2004 was one of the most important days in my life. And December 26 was one of the most important days in Ukraine and January 30 in Iraq. And I forget the exact date, but when the people of Georgia had the election of President Saakashvili in Georgia, which, I think, was in January of 2004. So for the first time in the post-Soviet period, we are actually seeing the full effect of this beautiful democratic process called free and fair elections, which enable what I would call the cleansing tide of democratic elections, to reflect the will of the people. So, 2004 was a very bad year for the forces of oppression and a great year for the forces of freedom and democracy. And you now have the opportunity, here in early 2005, to also show the world that the will of an informed electorate will be heard and will elect those who will lead them.

That brings me to the OSCE. Because the OSCE, through ODIHR (the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights), has been a key participant in many countries – including the United States – to ensure that elections meet the standards to which all 55 participating States of the OSCE agreed. Unfortunately, there is a crisis going on right now in the OSCE, because the Russian Federation does not like what has happened in elections in Georgia and, more recently, in Ukraine. It doesn't like the OSCE being an instrument for democratizing participating States whose leadership resist democratization. At least, that is what one of Russia's Deputy Foreign Ministers said in a press conference on December 6, 2004. I thought it was an absolutely remarkable statement. Specifically, what he said was that the OSCE purports to be spreading universal values. But, he said, those are not universal values. Those are Western values and those are not "our" values, he said. This is a remarkable statement for a representative of a government that was a signatory to the Helsinki Final Act in 1975.

In making that statement, the speaker seems to have forgotten that the great struggle of the 20th century was between liberty and totalitarianism. And he seems to have forgotten that the struggle ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single and sustainable model for national success. And that model consists of freedom, democracy, and free enterprise. And only nations that share a commitment to protecting basic human rights and guaranteeing political and economic freedom will be able to unleash the potential of their people and assure their future prosperity.

Just a couple of weeks ago, President Bush, in his Inaugural Address, made some extraordinary statements which I would like to share with you. What he said was that for half a century America defended our own freedom by standing watch on distant borders. And he went on to say that after the shipwreck of communism came, years of relative quiet, years of repose, years of sabbatical. And then, he went on to say, came a day of fire. And the light from that fire can be the light that will lead you and your country to the full realization of the fruits of freedom and liberty.

One of the basic underpinnings of American foreign policy is that the survival of liberty in the United States increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands.

Our President then went on to make a remarkable statement which you will see reflected in American foreign policy throughout the world in the days and years ahead. And what he said was that America's vital interests and its deepest beliefs are now one. Think about that, because for so much of history many countries – including the United States – have separated their vital interests and their deepest beliefs when it has been necessary to do so for the sake of economic and political expediency. That is why, in world history, human rights have often been relegated to secondary status. But not with our President who has proudly proclaimed that our vital interests and our deepest beliefs are one.

From the date of the founding of the United States in 1776, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights and dignity and matchless value. We have proclaimed and we have stood on the proposition that no one is fit to be a master and no one deserves to be a slave. Advancing these ideas is the mission that created our Nation, and so it is the policy of the United States to support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny and oppression throughout the world. To achieve that objective, however, is not primarily the task of arms, of armed forces, of guns. Rather, freedom, by its very nature, must be chosen and defended by citizens and sustained by the rule of law. So our goal is to help others find their own voice to obtain their own freedom and to make their own way. And we will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and nation. And that choice is the moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right. And America will never pretend that jailed dissidents prefer their chains. Or that women welcome humiliation and servitude. Or that any human being aspires to live at the mercy of bullies. So that is the dream that we have and that is the underlying philosophy of our foreign policy as we move ahead in the days that lie ahead.

As I have mentioned earlier, OSCE has been criticized – principally by Russia – for an alleged overemphasis on human rights and on elections. It has been accused of using so-called “double standards” in these areas. Russia says that rather than bringing people together, the OSCE is now driving them apart, by creating artificial barriers. Russia has asked whether we even still need the OSCE.

I must tell you that I absolutely and emphatically disagree with these criticisms, and so did Secretary Powell at the December 2004 Sofia Ministerial Meeting. Our answer is that there are no “double standards”.

All OSCE participating States signed up, in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, to the proposition that fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law are of legitimate concern to all of us. As a matter of fact, under the Helsinki Final Act, we have an obligation to assist each other to adhere to, and to practice these fundamental principles.

Another fundamental principle of the OSCE is that there are no dividing lines. The same standards apply to all, and all have their legitimate equal place in the organization. We need the OSCE now more than ever. And I say this because the OSCE is doing important work that can only be done by an organization with the broadest, most open membership.

During 2004, OSCE through ODIHR, observed twelve elections in Europe, North America, and Central Asia, including, as I mentioned, the Presidential election in the United States.

In all cases, ODIHR assessed the elections against OSCE electoral commitments, which were freely entered into – freely entered into – by all participating States. And what these principles boil down to is very simple and that is that the election process must be judged to be fair by the people. And when that is not the case, the elections are illegitimate. They are not legitimate as a means of transferring power to whoever may be elected. Period. Full stop.

That said, no election is perfect. And a free and fair election does not take place only on election day. What I'm going to say to you next is very important, very important for your country. And that is that OSCE electoral commitments address not only the technical conduct of actual balloting but also the degree of access to the election process by opposition and independent candidates and parties; access to the media and the public during the campaign period, and their right to raise campaign resources and to deploy them. Thus, it is critical that in the days that remain before your election on March 6, that the candidates have a level playing field so that voters have the information they need to make informed decisions.

For the most part, Moldova had a good record in holding free and fair elections, among the states which were formed following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The local elections however, in the spring of 2003, while generally in accordance with OSCE commitments, also showed the beginnings of a negative trend.

ODIHR found, the OSCE found, in 2003 that there were notable shortcomings centered on allegations of abuse of power in the expenditure of administrative resources on behalf of candidates that were already serving in the government. Let's face it: incumbents have certain advantages that challengers do not have. But it is always unfair to expend public resources on behalf of certain candidates and not others.

As I said, Moldova has, for the most part, held elections which have been in accordance with OSCE commitments. Even the troubling 2003 election assessment report found bright spots which included competent and professional election officials and a public with high confidence in the election process. Thus, I call upon you here this afternoon, as well as on you who are not here, the hundreds of thousands of Moldovans who will be voting on March 6, to help make it possible to hold elections of which you will be proud and which will be admired by the world.

In closing, let me say one more thing. Moldova is looking to integrate with the West. The United States welcomes that choice. Free and fair elections are a key litmus test that the U.S. and EU will use to evaluate Moldova's true desire to integrate itself. And Moldova has an outstanding, historic and unique opportunity to solidify its credentials to be a part of the democratic community of nations by holding the best possible election on March 6. So I say to you: do not allow that opportunity to slip through your fingers and, instead, do everything that you can to enable your country to avail itself of that opportunity.

Thank you.